



**Request for City Council Committee Action
From the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development**

Date: October 2, 2003

To: Zoning and Planning Committee

Prepared or Submitted by: Jack Byers

Phone: (612) 673-2634

Approved by: Chuck Ballentine, Planning Director

Subject: *The Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*

Presenters in Committee: Jack Byers

Recommendation:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Zoning and Planning Committee accept the above findings and the *Public Comment Report*, **approve** the *Downtown East North Loop Master Plan*, dated May 1, 2003. Staff is further directed to propose the necessary changes to City's Code of Ordinances in order to ensure compatibility with the vision and policy direction set forth the master plan.

Financial Impact (Check those that apply)

☒ X No financial impact or Action is within current budget.

☐ Action requires an appropriation increase to the Capital Budget

☐ Action requires an appropriation increase to the Operating Budget

☐ Action provides increased revenue for appropriation increase

☐ Action requires use of contingency or reserves

☐ Other financial impact (Explain):

☐ Request provided to the Budget Office when provided to the Committee Coordinator

Previous Directives: City Council review and approval of the Request for Proposals for the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*, January 2001.

Community Impact: See "Background and Public Process" in the attached staff report. Also see *Public Comment Report* for the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*, dated September 2003 (attached).

Background/Supporting Information:

Attached:

- Staff report, dated September 25, 2003
- *Public Comment Report* for the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*, dated September 2003

Under separate cover:

- Draft version of the Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan, dated May 1, 2003. Hardcover copies were distributed to Council Members in June 2003. On-line version is available at:
www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/master-plans/downtown-east-north-loop/

Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development

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STAFF REPORT

DATE: September 25, 2003

TO: Zoning and Planning Committee, Minneapolis City Council

FROM: Jack Byers, CPED

RE: *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*

The *Minneapolis Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* is intended to serve as a vision and strategy for how new growth should occur in the underdeveloped districts of Downtown Minneapolis, particularly in those areas that surround proposed rail transit stations. Because a large proportion of space on the eastern and western ends of Downtown is underdeveloped and underutilized, the introduction of rail transit service offers new opportunities to rethink how the economic potential of these districts can be captured. With this goal in mind, the primary objective of the Master Plan is to encourage renewed interest in living, working, and shopping in Downtown Minneapolis through the creation of a high-quality, easy-to-use physical environment; one that enhances the everyday urban experience.

The *Minneapolis Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* proposes a vision that aims to:

- Articulate the market potential inherent in underdeveloped districts of Downtown.
- Integrate transportation and land use planning in order to encourage and realize more "complete" neighborhoods and communities.
- Capitalize on the introduction of rail transit and encourage a less auto-dependent downtown by concentrating high density, mixed-use development within easy walking distance of transit stations.
- Encourage the design and delivery of high quality public spaces and streetscapes while reinforcing pedestrian linkages to existing Downtown amenities.
- Foster the development of mixed-use precincts through modifications to the local regulatory framework in a way that encourages redevelopment while protecting and advancing city and community interests.

The full draft master plan and the Executive Summary can be found on the City's website at:

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/master-plans/downtown-east-north-loop/>

Bound hard copies of the draft master plan were distributed to the Mayor, City Council Members, and Planning Commissioners in mid-June 2003.

Background and Public Process:

In the summer of 2001, the Minneapolis Planning Department commissioned a consultant team to collect information, conduct analysis, and complete the scope of services called for in the *Minneapolis Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*. The Consultant Team was led by the IBI Group of Irvine, CA and it included the following subconsultants: Bonz/REA of Boston, MA, the Hoisington Koeigler Group, Inc. of Minneapolis and Benshoof and Associates, also of Minneapolis.

Throughout the second half of 2001 and the first half of 2002, the Consultant Team met on a regular basis with a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) convened specifically for this project. During that time, the Consultant Team also conducted four workshops for a larger group of stakeholders - the Steering Committee - that included civic, neighborhood, and business leaders. Likewise, four Open Houses were conducted in order to engage the general public and to seek their input into the master plan as it evolved. Over the course of the project, the work program followed a general planning sequence beginning with data collection and problem identification. Once this was completed, data analysis was initiated and various alternatives for potential outcomes were generated. Alternatives were reviewed and discussed by the Technical Advisory Committee, the Steering Committee, and the general public in order to develop and strengthen a series of recommendations and proposals for action and implementation.

Throughout the master plan process the Planning Department both publicized the project and informed the public about the work as it unfolded. This was done in order to encourage public participation in the analysis and review process. Specifically, the Planning Department used the following methods to inform and engage the public:

- Databases of US mail and e-mail contacts were set up for (a) participants in the four public meetings and (b) “interested parties” who sought to keep in touch with the process even if they had not attended a public meeting.
- Prior to each public meeting, hard copy notices/invitations were sent to approximately 2,000 property owners, taxpayers, and residents in and around the Project Area. Meeting notices were also published in the “Community Calendar” section of the Sunday *StarTribune*.
- The Consultant Team produced four newsletters during the analysis phase of the project; one each as a summary of the four open houses/public meetings. Newsletters were distributed by hard copy and/or digital copy to meeting participants and interested parties throughout the course of the project.
- A web site for the master plan was set up by the Planning Department and the City’s ITS/BIS Department. On-line viewing was the chief venue for reading and reviewing the draft master plan during the public review and comment period, which was held in the Summer of 2003.
- Hard copy versions of the draft master plan were distributed to various sites in Downtown Minneapolis for those who do not have access to the World Wide Web or for those who chose to review the plan in book form.
- Beyond the four public meetings/open houses conducted by the Consultant Team, the Project Manager in the Planning Department made more than thirty additional presentations to various neighborhood and community organizations, staff groups, and City boards and commissions.

The formal public review and comment period for the draft master plan was held from June 16th through August 1st 2003. At the close of the review and comment period, Planning Staff assembled all written comments received throughout the course of the entire project into the *Public Comment Report* so that Planning Commissioners and City Council members could read the verbatim comments of members of the Downtown Community.

The *Public Comment Report* for the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* was compiled and distributed to the City Planning Commission and the City Council for their review. Because the

document includes written comments submitted at public meetings or through the U.S. mail, a digital version of this document is not available. Hard copies are available to the general public upon request.

Considerations for Approval of the Master Plan

In reviewing the master plan for adoption, there are several considerations that should be kept in mind:

Concurrent area planning efforts:

It should be noted that three other master planning efforts were underway when work on the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* began:

- *The Elliot Park Master Plan*
- *The Hennepin County Multi-Modal Station Area Plan*
- Various efforts related to planning a downtown baseball stadium/ballpark

From the outset, it was the explicit intent of the Planning Department (reinforced through the written contract with the IBI Group) to fully consider these overlapping efforts and to formulate policies, tools, and mechanisms that could be used to effect the kinds of proposals brought forward in the combined master planning efforts. Great care was taken to fully understand the issues discussed in each of these three parallel projects and to incorporate their findings and recommendations into the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan*.

Overall tone of community feedback:

Even a general reading of the *Public Comment Report* for this project indicates a high level of positive feedback for the ideals and recommendations put forth in the master plan. That this sort of feedback is the norm is not an accident or coincidence. Throughout the course of the project, the Consultant Team and the Technical Advisory Committee worked hard to ensure that the points of view offered by stakeholders and community members were well considered and weighed in relation to one another. The Consultant Team showed a particular talent for developing options and revising work based on community feedback received. For these reasons, Planning staff can say with complete confidence that the general thrust of the master plan is in keeping with the larger goals and aspirations of the Downtown community.

That said, not all comments submitted were of a positive nature. It should be noted however, that the vast majority of negative comments were those that called into question the City's ability to implement the master plan. There was particular concern about the City's ability to effectively accomplish dramatic changes to the regulatory framework (see notes on the Implementation of plan recommendations, below). Even for those that had negative comments or concerns about how the City would go about the implementing the plan, there seemed to be agreement and positive feedback that the substantive goals and ideals of the master plan are in the right direction.

The City explicitly sought and paid for an outside point of view:

It should be noted that the City specifically sought an outside consultant for the express purpose of gaining a frank perspective on a set of problems and challenges that have dogged Downtown Minneapolis for at least three or four decades, if not longer. As a City, we challenged our hired consultants to tell us the hard truth about what is keeping the Project Area from developing in a manner similar to so many other banner projects elsewhere in Downtown and around the City. Again and again, the Consultant Team was challenged to go beyond pat responses and pretty pictures to demonstrate (a) why various proposals are so critical to the City's future and (b) how

each proposal might be implemented. To that end, the Consultant Team deserves a great deal of recognition for staying the course. More importantly, through the body of work produced, the Consultant Team has in turn enabled the Downtown community to level a challenge for the City; a challenge to move forward in the implementation of this plan in a manner that continues to capture attention, imagination, and the full potential of Downtown.

Jump starting development in the Project Area with a new vision:

The cumulative effect of policies within this plan would be to jump-start development in two very hard to develop areas - Downtown East and the North Loop. At its heart, the master plan is a vision for a much different kind of downtown than we currently have in Minneapolis. By establishing a vision for a series of “Complete Communities” that are at once self-sufficient while also being interdependent on one another, the master plan seeks to build upon the existing strengths of Downtown while taking advantage of the unique opportunities coming up in the next decade or two. Taking advantage of these opportunities in a thoughtful, deliberate way will allow the City to enhance Downtown’s role in the region by solidifying it as an exciting, attractive, and economically productive place to be. Adopting the master plan sends a signal that the City is willing to move forward on addressing long entrenched problems.

Implementation of plan recommendations:

Adopting the master plan is crucial for setting policy that guides future decision making. This is particularly important, because the *Minneapolis Downtown 2010 Plan* is largely silent on the specific issues and challenges that are inherent within the Project Area. Beyond the primary task of setting a vision as a matter of record, the intention of the *Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan* is to move toward realization of the vision through the specific ways in which the plan is implemented.

It must be kept in mind that adopting the master plan does not constitute immediate change to the City’s Code of Ordinances. In other words, adoption of the plan does not equate adoption of amendments to the Zoning Code. Each of the proposals and policy recommendations within the plan that relate specifically to the City’s regulatory framework will need to be revisited and fully considered in context with existing regulations and procedures in order to determine whether, when, and how the regulation should be changed. Those recommendations that relate to the Zoning Code will need to be further refined through CPED staff processes. In some cases, it will be necessary to work closely with other City departments and boards in order to craft ordinance language that ultimately achieves the desired effect. Once refined, these items will need to be brought through the City’s approval process collectively or individually in order for them to be adopted as amendments or revisions to the City’s existing regulations. Additional public hearings would need to be held with the City Planning Commission and the City Council at that time.

Therefore, *adopting the Master Plan does not change the Zoning Code*. Instead, it is a road map that identifies what needs to be addressed and held in full consideration as revisions to the Code are made in order to realize the goals, vision, and recommendations of the plan. Exactly how the policies of the master plan are reinforced through the Code of Ordinances is subject to further examination of how such changes can be made most efficiently and most effectively. Potential revisions to the Code will come back through the Planning Commission and the City Council in a separate process.

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Zoning and Planning Committee accept the above findings and the *Public Comment Report*, **approve** the *Downtown East North Loop Master Plan*, dated May 1, 2003. Staff is further directed to propose the necessary changes to City's Code of Ordinances in order to ensure compatibility with the vision and policy direction set forth the master plan.

ATTACHMENT #1



**Minnesota Department of Transportation
Office of Transit**

395 John Ireland Boulevard
Mail Stop 430
Saint Paul, MN 55155

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E-mail: mike.schadauer@dot.state.mn.us

September 19, 2003

Jack Byers
Minneapolis Planning Department
City Hall, Room 210
350 South 5th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1385

Dear Mr. Byers,

An article in the September 18, 2003 *StarTribune* discussed a proposal by Investment Management, Inc. for a housing or housing and stadium(s) development in the North Loop. While the article said the developers recognize the value of transit access to their development, it does not appear that their current proposal offers enough space for all the tracks and related infrastructure that could be needed to realize potential future rail transportation goals.

The North Loop has the only remaining railroad tracks in downtown Minneapolis. Future commuter rail lines could serve a downtown Minneapolis station in the North Loop from the northwest, southwest, and east. Conceptual estimates based on likely scheduling and operating scenarios suggest that four through tracks would be needed to serve future commuter rail. This is in addition to two through tracks to serve freight trains. With a four-track, two-center platform station and two freight tracks, the right-of-way width would be in the range of 160 to 200 feet. The basic corridor width leading to the terminal from each direction should accommodate two freight tracks and at least two station lead tracks with a right-of-way width of at least 90 feet. To plan for future needs, platforms should be approximately 850 feet long with straight tracks along side. Eight hundred to 1100 feet of right-of-way transition space would be needed from the ends of the platforms to the basic corridor right-of-way.

The addition of terminating intercity trains and their storage needs may further expand track and platform requirements, depending on service volumes. For example, if the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative, which currently considers higher speed service between Chicago and St. Paul, would be extended to Minneapolis, more tracks and platforms would be needed. These could probably be stub tracks, rather than through tracks, ending north of 5th Street North, thereby avoiding the proposed baseball stadium site. Each additional platform, with tracks on each side, would add 50 to 65 feet to the required right-of-way width.

To keep its options for future passenger rail service open, the City of Minneapolis may wish to plan for a fairly wide corridor for rail infrastructure fanning southwest from the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad tracks at ground level. As has been done at many other central business district rail stations, development could begin one level up, at the 5th Street North level. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike Schadauer
Fixed Guideway Transit Manager

cc: Donna Allan, Al Vogel, Sam Khan; Mn/DOT. Tim Yantos; NCDA